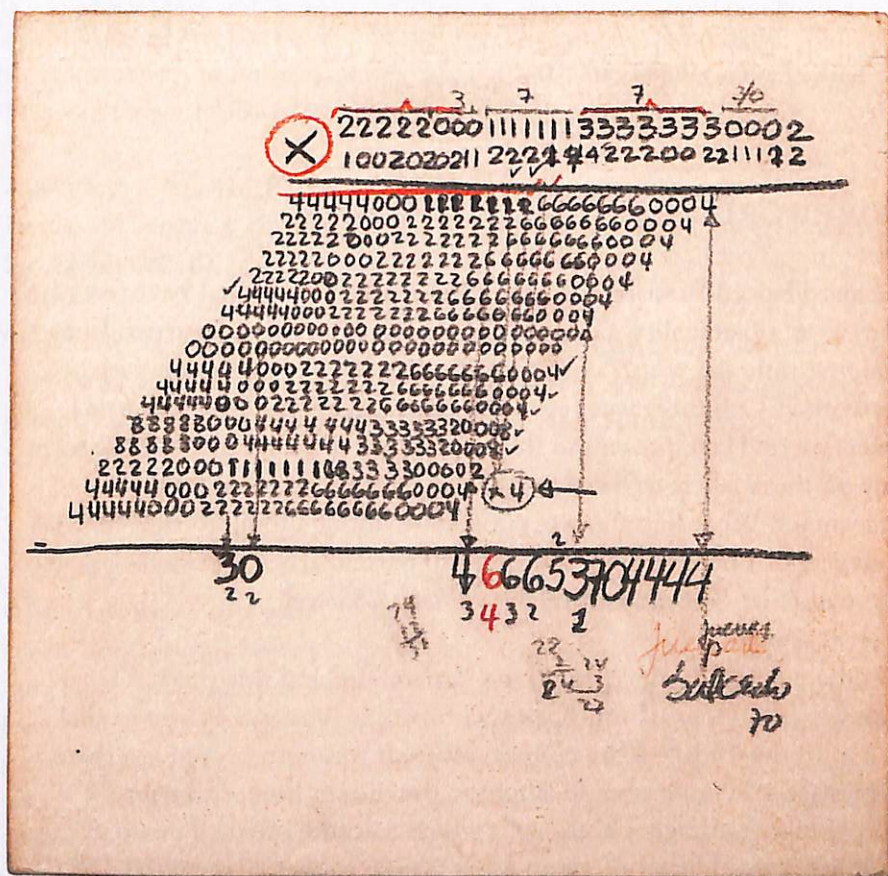


HOMENAJES MAMM

BERNARDO SALCEDO

How to Do Things
with Words



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December 2016 - March 2017

Galleries A, B and The Foundry

FOREWORD

Bernard Salcedo's work has been catalogued in ways that have inscribed him as an objectualist, a conceptualist, and even as a pop artist. In fact, the first time the word "conceptual" was used in connection with an artwork in Colombia was regarding his installation *Hectárea de beno* [Hectare of Hay], present in this exhibition. It would be hard to assign any of these labels to Salcedo without falling into some kind of inaccuracy. What this show proposes—without aiming to split its vital practice, as I believe that they are both particularly connected—is that the nature of Salcedo's work was *textualistic* as well.

Let me expand: In developing the research behind this show, I conducted a series of interviews with people who were close to the artist. In the midst of the conversations, it was common to see them reminisce and remember in laughter, the distant look, or some surprisingly untimely phrase with which Salcedo knocked down a politician, a public work, or an artist. These stories all concurred in presenting him as an intimist subject, a lover of conversation who was particularly aware of what he could build—or demolish—with words.

On the other hand, an archive investigation produces evidence of a writer Salcedo with publications in various media, newspapers and magazines, from which he practiced art criticism, combining his name and pseudonyms. He also took part in the interest, shared by many Latin American artists, in editorial resources and the access to the viewer from other circulation platforms different from the exhibition in galleries or museums. There are numerous interviews and self-interviews in which the plasticity with which Salcedo uses, employs, and forces language is evident. And I consider this part of his work.

In most, if not all of his plastic works, the title raises a tense, humorous or absurd articulation in connection with the work. It is precisely the nervous or threatening tensions between work and title that produce the semiosis... and, why not say it: the poetics!

I list the language displacements that I have identified as the most common in Salcedo, as follows:

- 1- Literality
- 2- Employment of tropes and terms of popular usage
- 3- Double meanings
- 4- Wordplay
- 5- Paradoxical images

On the other hand, Salcedo's conceptualism, if we decide to use this term, is national; it is deeply rooted in the country. His reflection always dovetailed with the life of the nation and the use of words in it.

I would like to close this text with the following comment: The name I chose for this exhibition reflects the title of a seminal text by philosopher J. L. Austin. With poetic freedom, I have adopted it to point out that Salcedo produced a world—iconic or iconophobic, depending on the moment—through words. That is, he made words do things. And he activated things.

In this regard, I would like to add the following: language is the only means through which humans make intelligible our sensitive perceptions about what is real. If we consider this inevitable human condition, we realize that language does not belong to us as individuals, but we are rather inhabited by language; that is, we are subjects of language as we inherit it and by inheriting it it makes us its subjects.

Thus, the orders from where we make the world intelligible—grammar, categories—do not belong to us; we inherit them. The sensitive use of language, however, has the ability to extricate itself out of linguistic labeling, through different resources: grammatical displacement, wordplay, the disbandment of sense or plain nonsense. And there, we go back to Salcedo. His vital operation had to do with a critical exercise of that sort.

It is important to remember that this curatorial perspective does not exhaust the work of Bernard Salcedo nor it seeks to do so. Instead, it invites other thinkers to continue the reflection on a body of work that has produced foundational milestones in Colombian art. It proposes listing such oeuvre among what could be called the "linguistic turn," which is present in 20th-century art and is the engine of many operations that are typical of movements and explorations. It is also an invitation to revisit the work of the Bogotá-born artist from a critical perspective, always tinged with humor: an ingredient that is cross-cutting in the irreverent practices of Salcedo and the enjoyment that hides behind them.

Ana María Lozano / Curator

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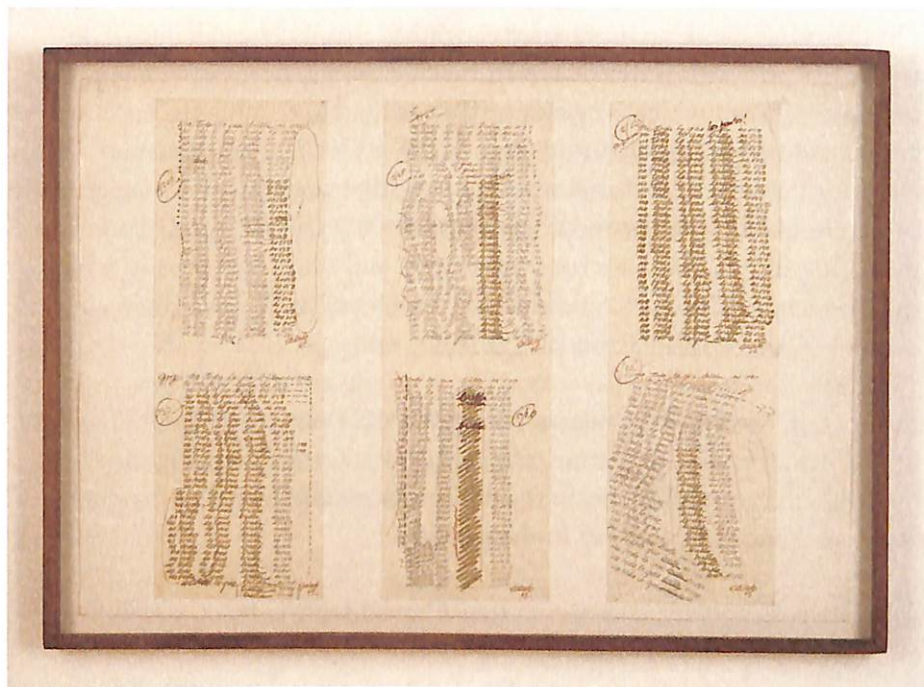
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Bernardo Salcedo, *Not All that Shines Is Gold* from the series "Lines" (Fragment), 1969